PEOPLE OF MYSTERY: SOUL MATTERS

DECEMBER 2018

**Opening Words:** From “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—

over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

**Topic Introduction:**

Oliver’s call to listen for life’s announcements implies a letting go. Mystery is funny this way. You can’t make it speak. Indeed the more you pursue the answers to life’s mysteries; the more distant they become. If we want mystery to speak, it seems we have to be willing to be caught off guard. UU humanist minister and poet, David Breeden, captures this beautifully when he writes,

I dug and dug, Deeper into the earth,

Looking for blue heaven, Choking always, On piles of dust rising,

Then once, At midnight , I slipped, And fell into the sky

Slipping, and then falling into the sky. Is there a better way to describe our dance with mystery? Isn’t this what all the great mystics have been trying to tell us from the start? That sitting at the heart of mystery is not the unknown, but unity. We fall into mystery and it falls into us. Its voice is one that whispers, “I am you and you are me.”

Mystery doesn’t put up barriers; it dissolves them. Haven’t all of us faced the wonder and mystery of a sunset, the stars, a baby’s first cry or a lover’s wet kiss and thought to ourselves, “Who I am does not end at the barrier of my skin”?

We’ve all experienced it: the mystery of an ordinary moment that suddenly unfolds and offers deep meaning. The everyday becomes luminous. This exercise invites you to remember some of those luminous moments and revisit the gift they gave.

Since the beginning of our existence, star-gazing has been a primary way we humans contemplate mystery. For scientist and mystic alike, it is a central way we sort out our mysterious place in the universe and the mystery of who we are. As we connect with the universe we connect more deeply with ourselves.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What was the first mystery to capture your imagination? How does that still shape you today?
2. Has mysterious “meaningful coincidence” ([synchronicity](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sense-and-sensitivity/201112/the-art-meaningful-coincidence)) ever pointed you in the direction you needed to go, right when you were not sure of your way?
3. Pico Iyer says that “The opposite of knowledge isn't always ignorance. It can be wonder. Or mystery. Possibility. And in my life, I've found it's the things I don't know that have lifted me up and pushed me forwards, much more than the things I do know.” When has “what you don’t know” pushed you forward into new possibilities and greater knowing?
4. Do you spend more time treating life like a problem to be solved, a game to be won, a struggle to be survived or a mystery to be lived?
5. It’s said that we stop struggling to feel at peace once we experience the mysterious and transcendent “love that will not let us go.” Has this been true for you? Maybe more importantly, what if it’s true?

**Closing Words: Herman Hesse**

Sometimes, when a bird cries out,

Or the wind sweeps through a tree,

Or a dog howls in a far-off farm,

I hold still and listen a long time.

My soul turns and goes back to the place

Where, a thousand forgotten years ago,

The bird and the blowing wind

Were like me, were my brothers and sisters.

My soul turns into a tree...